DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 043 032 AL 002 595

AUTHOR	Stokes, Anne M.
TITLE	The Old Order Changeth.
PUB DATE	[70]
NOTE	6p.; To appear in ATEQ (Association of Teachers of English of Quebec) Journal (Special Issue No. 1, Teaching English as a Second language), III.2, 1970
AVAILABLE FROM	Etudes Anglaises, Universite de Montreal, C.P. 6128, Motreal, Quebec
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.40
DESCRIPTORS	*Diachronic Linguistics, *English, *English (Second Language), Language Styles, *Standard Spoken Usage, Teacher Attitudes

ABSTRACT

That the English language has changed greatly over the centuries is an accepted fact; the fact that the movement hasn't stopped should also be accepted. Examples of analogic changes which are taking place in syntax and morphology illustrate the state of flux of English. However, many teachers of English still believe that it is their duty to guard the language against change. This resistance to change can have a calamitous effect on non-native speakers because some of their solecisms might be the very indicator that they are grasping the idiom of the language. The author feels that the non-native speaker who can write, in the proper context, "Like I say," "That man is much taller than me," or "That coffee tastes real good" deserves commendation. He is really learning the language, and it will be time enough to make distinctions of level and style when he has acquired native ability of expression. (AMM)

ED 043032

AL 002 595

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

The Old Order Changeth

Anne M. Stokes
Sir George Williams University

Traditions die hard, and many teachers of English still believe that it is their duty to guard the language against change. They are fearful that change will head to linguistic chaos. Unfortunately, however, their inflexibility has often turned their pupils against writing, even though some of them, given proper encouragement, could have produced more expressive colourful prose than many of the pedants who have published. This resistance to change can have an even more calamitous effect on non-native speakers, because some of their solecisms might be the very indicator that they are grasping the idiom of the language.

We all know that English has changed greatly over the centuries. We should be equally aware of the fact that the movement hasn't stopped. The causes of change are varied and sometimes difficult to isolate. However, in many instances the process of analogy is evident, and it is on this aspect of change that I would like to focus. I shall limit myself to a few examples of changes that have occurred in the past, and attempt to show that there are perceptible drifts taking place right now. Perhaps, as a result, some teachers may more readily excuse certain errors, and may also gain additional insight into the reasons for some of the 'mistakes' that their pupils make.

Guardians of the language are particularly sensitive to changes in syntax. However, one change that took place long ago clearly foreshadowed some drifts of today. The word before was once just a

preposition; later it became a conjunction as well. Sturtevant[1] suggests that analogy was at work here and explains it thus.

sunrise : He left before sunrise
the sun rose : He left before the sun rose

When we use the word today as a conjunction we are operating within the boundaries of respectable grammar. But what about the following?

drunkard : He behaved like a drunkard
He was drunk : He behaved like he was drunk

Although the same process of analogy is at work, many teachers will not accept the use of like as a conjunction. Or consider this reverse analogy:

Recognized form : He is more generous than we (are)
Often used : He is more generous than us.

Here the conjunction than is striving hard to extend its function to that of a preposition.

The who-whom controversy has been debated so extensively that there is little point in discussing it in detail. Suffice it to say that fifty years ago Sapir[2] forecast that except in a limited number of constructions whom would disappear from the language. The battle waged by our language militants is still going on but they are fighting a lost cause: whom is moribund. And a good thing too, for with it will disappear the faltering and fumbling that precedes such frequently incorrect utterances as, The man whom we think committed the crime got away.

In certain structures the traditional subject-verb agreement is now often ignored. Didn't I just violate the rule in my previous paragraph? Constructions such as Here comes the bride and groom,

or A pile of clothes were on the floor are frequently used. The cause of such 'errors' is obvious. In the first example the delayed subject is contrary to the normal preverbal position of the subject. The user thinks of Here as a singular subject, and therefore puts the verb in the singular as well. In the second instance, the user is thinking of the entire locution A pile of clothes as subject and is consequently influenced by the plurality of the final word. Recently I heard a person high in academe say, I didn't know what the purpose of the lectures were. The slip is surely pardonable.

Analogic change is not confined to syntax. We have abundant evidence of it in morphology. For example, the plural of cow was once kine. The modern form was not recorded in the dictionary until the 17th century. One can readily imagine that the change was first brought about by the common man who was not inhibited by grammatical laws. Bloomfield[3] illustrates the analogy thus:

bough	:	boughs
sow	:	sows
cow	:	x

A somewhat similar modification is taking place now with the word agenda. So strong is our tendency to pluralize by adding s that the word agendas is now frequently used, and as a result, a process of back-formation is taking place so that the word agenda is being adopted as the singular form.

Two locutions that seem to be gaining ever greater respectability are real good and feel badly. Both expressions are common among users of standard English, and I suspect that some day the person who says really good will be considered as pompous as the one who persists in saying It is I. What part does analogy play in these two expres-

sions? It seems to me that real in its sense here has much the same meaning as the intensifiers very, quite, or rather. They are all adverbs, it is true, but they do not have the -ly ending that we commonly associate with adverbs and so we shift to real in an attempt to conform to its synonyms. I feel badly is more difficult to explain because most certainly users of this expression would never dream of saying I feel sadly or I feel madly. Nevertheless, one can recognize in the expression the tendency to make the linking verb behave like other intransitive verbs which are followed by an adverb:

He plays badly.
He feels x

We are all aware of how we extend meanings of words by the process of analogy: we worm our way into something, we inch forward, we snake over a mountain trail or we weasel on some commitment. All will agree that such new verbs lend vigour to the language. And of course our creativity knows no bounds when we start playing around with a suffix like -ize. We nationalize and finalize and verbalize and rationalize. Sometimes we go overboard in our analogy and educationalize or fragmentize when there is absolutely no need for these words since verb forms already exist. Nevertheless while caution is needed, there are certain morphological extensions that have gained such wide usage in recent years that their new function cannot be ignored. Words such as structure and research, for example, are now transitive verbs as well as nouns, and have even achieved dictionary recognition. Yet many teachers still brand them as unacceptable.

Who today would question the use of the verb peddle? Yet the word came into existence only after the noun peddler had entered the language, and resulted from an inverse analogy. Those who first used peddle probably erroneously reasoned thus:

a painter is one who paints
a buyer is one who buys
a peddler is one who x

It is interesting to note that the word enthuse derives from a somewhat similar back formation. Needless to say, the purists still strenuously oppose its intrusion into the language; nevertheless, enthuse is being used increasingly by reputable writers[4] and will eventually gain full recognition.

The foregoing illustrations provide but a minuscule idea of the state of flux of our language. It would be brash at this point to posit that all the changes taking place right now are beneficial. Chronological distance is necessary to put new forms in their proper perspective. It can only be in the future that the changes of today can be bested against Jespersen's formula for language excellence: communication with a "maximum of efficiency and a minimum of effort."[5]

There are,however, immediate implications for us as teachers of English. While we certainly do not intend to condone cumbersome wooly sentences or flabby lifeless prose, we need to be alert to current usage. How are educated speakers and writers using the language? Shouldn't we think twice before red pencilling certain 'errors'? And as for those of us engaged in teaching the language to non-English people, indulgence in regard to certain solecisms is absolutely necessary. The non-native speaker who can write, in the proper context, Like I say, That man is much taller than me, or That coffee tastes real good deserves commendation. He is really learning the

language, and it will be time enough to make distinctions of level and style when he has acquired native ability of expression.

Footnotes

1. Sturtevant, E. H. Linguistic Change, Chicago: Phoenix Books, 1961. p. 134.

2. Sapir, Edward. Language, New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1949. p. 162.

3. Bloomfield, Leonard. Language, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1933. p. 406.

4. The Random House Dictionary of the English Language. New York: Random House, 1968. p. 441.

5. Jespersen, Otto. Language, New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1964. p. 324.